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SIPDIS

NSC FOR T. SHANNON

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR PRESIDENT URIBE'S VISIT TO CRAWFORD

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood; reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

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Introduction and Summary  
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1. (C) President Uribe's visit to Crawford comes at a key moment and will serve as an opportunity to advance several items in our bilateral relationship. Uribe will thank the President for U.S. political support and financial assistance for the counter-drug, counter-terror, and development effort. He will repeat that we are his best ally in the region, and he is ours. He will thank us for support for Ambassador Luis Albert Moreno's successful bid for the presidency of the Inter-American Development Bank. Uribe may discuss his thoughts for the new Colombian ambassador to Washington.

Key topics likely to come up during the visit include:

--U.S. support in out years. Colombia wants reaffirmation of political support and assistance levels, and continuation of Plan Colombia.

--Demobilization and reinsertion of almost 6,000 former paramilitaries and several thousand more expected. Colombia wants continued U.S. political support and program assistance; U.S. wants rigorous enforcement of demobilization law and continued extraditions.

--Human rights. Colombia wants continued U.S. support; U.S. wants faster improvements in military accountability.

--Growing concern about Venezuela and region. Colombia wants an enhanced bilateral defense relationship, and suggests a positive agenda for the region and Latin America which all can join.

--Military progress and Plan Patriota. Colombia wants continued or higher levels of U.S. assistance, especially helicopters and help against high value targets.

--Record-breaking drug eradication and seizures. But manual eradication, spraying in parks, and competition for helicopters remain issues.

--Status of U.S. hostages. Colombian cooperation is superb.

--Free Trade Agreement negotiations. Colombia wants agriculture concessions and a faster pace; we want a faster pace too. Agreement to form a plant and animal health working group and brand-naming Colombian coffee are two possible initiatives.

--Judicial reform. The civilian oral accusatory system is working and popular. We want faster improvements in military justice system.

--Presidential re-election. The Constitutional Court decision is expected in late September; too close to call.

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U.S. Support  
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2. (C) In its four front war -- narcos, FARC, ELN, paramilitaries, Colombia is fighting each of the fronts with a different mix of political, military, police, and diplomatic measures, all of which are expensive and at times controversial. Requested U.S. assistance tops \$556 million in FY06, divided among military, police, development, humanitarian, and other accounts, continuing the steady decline from about \$602 million in FY03. Serious helicopter shortages continue to create a competition between counter-drug and counter-terrorism operations. Colombia hopes to begin mutual defense agreement negotiations in the autumn and may ask for increased intelligence sharing. Human rights certification, the Justice and Peace law, the Andean free trade agreement, aid to paramilitary demobilization, and the FY06 budget may have created a "perfect storm" on the Hill, at a time when we need U.S. congressional support even more than usual.

3. (C) Uribe will press for continued, outspoken budgetary

and political support. Plan Colombia expires in 2006; Uribe would welcome U.S. support for renewal or follow-on multi-year commitment. Uribe will probably request DOD assistance to sustain Plan Patriota operations through FY 2010 and continued FMF at the FY05 levels (\$99.2 million).

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Demobilization and Reinsertion  
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14. (C) The GOC has requested U.S. aid for the paramilitary demobilization and reinsertion process, including police aid to prevent FARC inroads in areas formerly under paramilitary domination. Until a recent DOJ decision, the U.S. was unable to assist the demobilization program and it reflects the lack of U.S. input. We need to develop congressional support and identify funds. Although the Netherlands, Sweden, and Ireland are providing modest bilateral assistance, the EU refuses to help, partly at the behest of NGOs. We have provided some assistance to verification aspects.

15. (C) Colombia passed the Law of Justice and Peace, which governs demobilization for ex-paramilitaries, on June 22. NGOs, some Europeans, and some on the Hill believe it is too lenient. The Colombian priority is to increase security for civilians by demobilizing paramilitary combatants and dismantling their organizations. But administration of the justice and reparations aspects, key to NGO support, has been slow and weak. Uribe is not happy with the pressure we are putting on him to demonstrate firmness by extraditing key paramilitary leaders or take some other visible step. He also has told us he will "suspend" extradition decisions for a few, selected key narcotics traffickers as a lever for their good future behavior.

16. (C) Since 2003, over 6,000 paramilitaries (AUC) have demobilized collectively and another 7,000 from all illegal armed groups have deserted. Violence against civilians is sharply down in all areas where demobilization has occurred. The GOC says that the remaining 10,000 paramilitaries will demobilize by the end of 2005, and the "justice" aspects will begin then.

17. (C) In related peace processes, the ELN has again refused GOC overtures, this time under Spanish facilitation. The FARC has steadily refused peace talks or an acceptable humanitarian prisoner exchange, in spite of Colombian efforts. A French mission, with GOC knowledge, recently met with a FARC senior commander to secure the release of FARC hostages, including dual French-Colombian citizen and former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt. The FARC or ELN are unlikely to make any concession before the re-election issue is settled; they would not want to give Uribe a prize and would prefer to deal with a successor government.

18. (C) We should offer support for demobilization, but underline that we can only support a tough process with full implementation of the justice and reparations provisions of the law. We should press for an early show of firmness, -- ideally extradition of prominent paramilitary leader Don Berna -- to demonstrate that the government, not the paramilitaries, is in the driver's seat.

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Human Rights  
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19. (C) The Uribe Administration continues to make progress in human rights, but needs to do more to ensure accountability, strengthen the military justice system, break military ties to paramilitary groups, and end corruption. The pending human rights certification will release about \$60 million of the blocked \$90 million in FY04 and FY05 funds. Progress has been steady but slow in several high profile human rights cases involving abuse or collaboration with the paramilitaries by the Colombian military. The GOC has recently taken positive steps on several outstanding cases.

110. (C) Even though the vast majority of human rights abuses crimes are attributable to the illegal armed groups, the government has a difficult dialogue with NGOs, the United Nations, and some foreign governments. In 2004, homicides fell by 16 percent, kidnappings by 42 percent, and forced displacements by 37 percent.

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Venezuela and the Region  
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111. (C) The Colombians want to manage the Venezuela problem, rather than confront it. Rather than taking Venezuela head-on, which risks splitting Latin America in a year with nine major elections, including four in the Andes, they have urged the U.S. to develop a "positive agenda," which would take the social agenda away from Chavez and give them and others something to join. In addition to trade, Colombia's key Venezuelan concerns are counter-terror and counter-drug.

They persuaded Venezuela to extradite one high profile FARC operative and sign several slightly forthcoming declarations on counter-terror and counter-drug. The Colombians will engage in cross-border operations into Venezuela whenever they think they have a clear terrorist target. Long-term concerns about Venezuela are prompting diversion of planning and resources away from the internal counter-drug and counter-terror threats and, for instance, are one reason for renewed Colombian interest in A-10s. The Colombians view the Venezuela threat as real, if not imminent, and will ask for a U.S. commitment to an enhanced defense relationship to meet the threat.

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Military Progress and Plan Patriota  
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12. (C) The Plan Patriota military offensive in south-central Colombia is putting the FARC stronghold under pressure. But the logistical strain of keeping 15,500 troops in the dense, hostile jungle, hundreds of miles from their supply bases, is huge, and they have yet to kill or capture a top level FARC leader. DOD funding for Plan Patriota has diminished in recent years.

13. (C) The FARC has been more aggressive in 2005, primarily in vulnerable peripheral areas against indigenous towns, local civilian leaders, electrical towers and rural highways, in addition to military and police outposts. Most recently, the FARC has staged a series of roadblocks and attacks in southern Putumayo Department; they shut down all transportation in the area, interrupted basic services, kidnapped 16 civilians, and displaced some 500 families.

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Drug Eradication/Interdiction  
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14. (C) Progress and cooperation with Colombia remain excellent, in spite of the competition for helicopters between the counter-terror and counter-drug priorities. Eradication and interdiction are at record levels. Over 100,000 hectares of coca and 1,000 hectares of opium poppy have been sprayed since the beginning of the year and 12,000 hectares of coca and poppy were manually eradicated, well ahead of 2004. Ground fire against spray planes is below 2003 levels but remains problematic. We lost a helicopter and a Salvadoran civilian contractor last month as a result of ground fire. Manual eradication, inefficient but environmentally uncontroversial and employment generating, is an issue. Spraying in national parks, some of which have high concentrations of mature, highly productive coca, is also unresolved.

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U.S. Hostages  
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15. (C) The three U.S. contractors captured by the FARC in February 2003 are now the longest U.S. terror captives in the world. Their safe release continues to be one of our top priorities, and embassy cooperation with Southcom is excellent. The Colombians are providing full assistance. Uribe renewed his assurance to Under Secretary Burns that he will insist that our hostages be included in any humanitarian exchange and that he will cooperate with U.S. efforts to free the hostages. The Colombian military has done its best to avoid military operations that might unnecessarily jeopardize our hostages.

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Free Trade Agreement/Economy  
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16. (C) This will be the first opportunity to renew our commitment to an Andean free trade agreement following House approval of CAFTA. Agriculture issues are a key, especially relating to chicken, corn, rice, and wheat. The U.S. just replied to the wholly inadequate agriculture offer made by Colombia in May; the Colombians may complain that our delay and sudden response did not give them enough time to respond before Crawford. Agriculture bilats are scheduled for early August. The twelfth round of Andean free trade talks in Miami ground out some progress; the next full round is scheduled for Colombia in September or early October. Colombian negotiators want to complete the agreement this year so election complications don't put it on hold until late 2006 or later. The economy is generally sound and strengthening.

17. (C) Uribe will again press for a more forthcoming U.S. approach on free trade. Uribe would welcome U.S. endorsement of a Colombian proposal to create a post-treaty working group to accelerate solutions on plant and animal health issues, which would give Uribe a win with no concrete trade effects on the U.S. An even bigger win would be U.S. endorsement of brand-naming Colombian coffee, again without trade costs to

us, but it would complicate some related WTO discussions and is resisted by some U.S. coffee retailers.

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Judicial Reform  
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118. (C) The U.S.-backed switch to an oral trial system has been successful and popular. The Colombian military justice system is reforming slowly. The new Defense Minister has promised to make it a priority.

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Presidential Reelection  
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119. (C) Congressional elections will take place next March; presidential elections next May. The Constitutional Court will rule on the possibility of presidential re-election in September; the outcome is uncertain. Positioning relating to the elections is dominating and confusing politics. If Uribe can run, he will win. He is above 65 percent approval in polls. The FARC is also electioneering: after a disastrous 2004, they have launched a limited, high profile, violent campaign to discredit Uribe's "democratic security" policy and weaken support for him and his supporters in the run-up to elections.

WOOD